The Middlebury Campus

VOL. CXXIV, No. 18 | MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT, APRIL 9, 2026 | middleburycampus.com

Science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson will deliver 2026 Commencement Address

By MANDY BERGHELA & YUVRAJ SHAH
Editor-in-Chief & Managing Editor

Kim Stanley Robinson, an award-winning American science fiction writer, will deliver the 2026 commencement address.

Robinson is best known as the author of the internationally bestselling "Mars" trilogy, a series that explores the terraforming of Mars and the political, scientific and ethical challenges of building a new society. His broader body of work — often described as "humanist" or "literary" science fiction — examines climate change, ecological sustainability and the role of technology in shaping collective futures.

Born in Waukegan, Ill., Robinson moved to Orange County, Calif., as a child, where he witnessed rapid suburban development reshape the natural landscape, an

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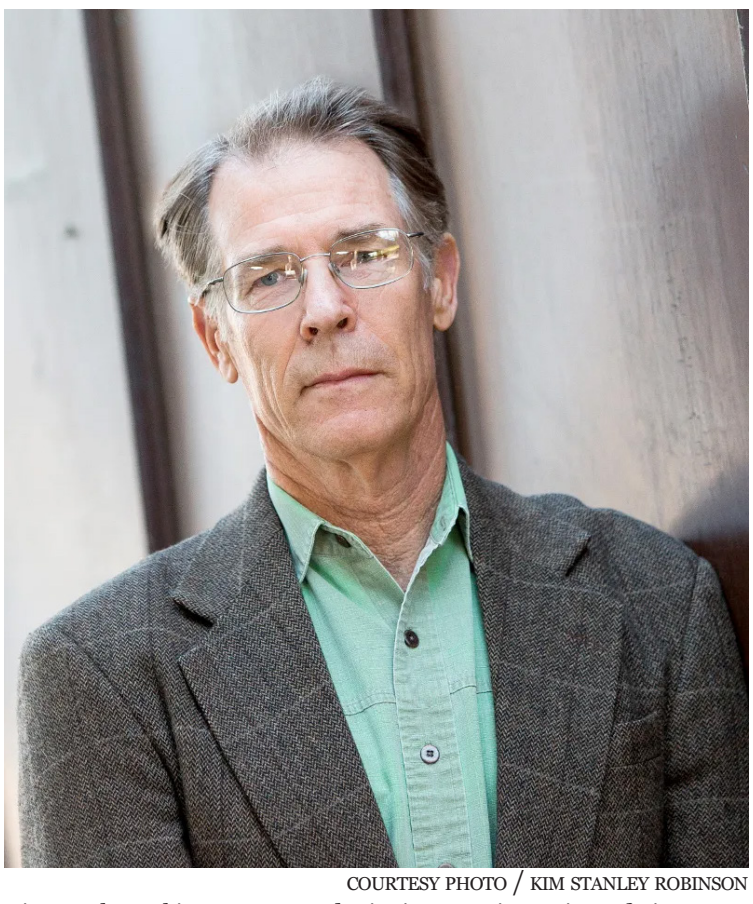

COURTESY PHOTO / KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

Kim Stanley Robinson, an award-winning American science fiction writer, will deliver the 2026 commencement address on May 24. The New Yorker has called Robinson "one of the greatest living science-fiction writers and one of the most important political writers working in America today."

From Kenya to Vermont: How KenSAP is reshaping access to Middlebury

By YUVRAJ SHAH
Managing Editor

For more than a decade, Middlebury College has hosted students from the Kenya Scholars Access Program (KenSAP), which brings high-achieving and high-need students from Kenya to colleges primarily in the United States.

With six students from the program currently enrolled at the college, the program is part of a variety of external organizations that the college works with to enroll international students who otherwise would not have the opportunity to apply to Middlebury.

KenSAP was founded in 2004 by Mike Boit and John Manners. Boit, who studied at East New Mexico University after representing Kenya in the Olympics, and Manners, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya in the 1960s, wanted to send students with high financial need to colleges in the United States.

In the first decade of its existence, the organization sent around 140 students to the United States, building long-term relationships with colleges across the country.

Executive Director Alan Davidson, who joined the organization in 2016, expanded its role from solely guiding students to universities to also include college preparation and long-term student support. Currently, KenSAP requires students to participate in a college-readiness program by taking a gap year before starting college.

"In addition to our college access work, we also provide college readiness support, which offers college-style coursework to prepare students academically as well as career and professional development programming," Davidson said in an interview with The Campus.

Part of this gap year is a six-month residential camp held between June and November. The camp is run by KenSAP

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DINING SERVICES OPENS 'THE DEN' IN ATHLETICS CENTER

By NOOR KHAN
News Editor

For student-athletes, Athletics staff, and regular gym-goers alike, the Peterson Family Athletics Complex is a daily fixture, but notably far from the college's main dining hubs. The Den was created to close that gap, bringing convenient access to food to a corner of campus that had long gone without it.

In its pilot phase, The Den is open Monday through Friday from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. and is located behind the concessions area in the athletics complex. The initial menu includes power and acai bowls, smoothies, salads and grab-and-go options, designed to offer healthier choices not widely available at other campus dining locations such as The Grille.

"I'm very excited about the opportunity to have healthy food options without leaving the building," Assistant Athletic Director Franklin Dean-Farrar said, toting a smoothie. "We work weird, crazy hours in athletics, and it's nice to have an option that's right here."

Dean-Farrar said that prior to The Den opening, Athletics staff only had the Tavern on the Tee (which is not open year-round) as an easily accessible spot for food.

"I think it's something that student-athletes and athletics staff have needed for a while," women's field hockey player Claire McMichael '27 said. "We're all busy, so it's nice to have a food option that is close to where we spend a lot of time, and I think it will help the whole campus to have something in this corner."

Head Women's Tennis Coach Olivia Leavitt, who had also ordered a smoothie, appreciated the stress relief that The Den potentially offers student-athletes.

"Sometimes our athletes are coming over here twice a day, right? If they have to worry about going from here to class back to here, and they're worried about food or grabbing a snack, it's great to have something on both sides of campus," Leavitt said.

According to several people in both Athletics and Retail Food Operations (RFO), conversations about having some kind of dining option in the Athletic Complex have been floating around for years, but the idea for The Den crystallized only quite recently. The Campus reported in a March 15 article that the opening of Domino's Pizza in Middlebury has caused a shift in sales for on-campus retail dining options. Assistant Director of Retail Operations Justin Edson said this has prompted the RFO team to reassess how they reach the Middlebury community.

"The sales volume isn't missing in retail. It's just changing — people are coming to different places at different times," Edson said.

More specifically, there has been an increase in retail traffic during the daytime. Given the record-breaking year in sales for concessions at the Athletic Center during hockey games and other sporting events — Edson

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QUEERS AND ALLIES HOSTS COMMUNITY PANEL FOR TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIBILITY

By RACHELLE TALBERT
News Editor

On April 2, Middlebury Queers and Allies (Q&A) organized a panel in recognition of Transgender Day of Visibility. The panel discussed topics ranging from building community to legal action countering anti-transgender legislation.

The event featured a diverse group of speakers: Alison Finch, director of Middlebury College Health Services; Lauren MacMullin, assistant professor of psychology; Michael Haley, attorney from GLAD Law –– an LGBTQ+ advocacy group; community activist Sydney Hansley; Simon Sammel, a transgender man who works in Davis Family Library as a full stack developer; and Loren Scott, operations manager at Middlebury International Student and Scholars Services, who has a PhD on representation of transgender people in the academic community.

According to Ridgly Anzalone '28, moderator of the panel and board member of Q&A, said the panel's purpose was to create a collective, safe environment that celebrated trans joy.

"Trans Day of Visibility was created in somewhat of a response to Trans Day of Remembrance, which is a day of mourning and acknowledgment of the things trans people have suffered. So in a way, it's a day of countering that," Anzalone said in an interview with The Campus. "A lot of the visibility we get is centered around violence or is otherwise negative. Days like Trans Day of Visibility are all about raising and making visible the happiness and joy of trans people, and coming together as a community to celebrate."

Building community — both in transgender spaces and elsewhere — is essential, according to many of the panelists. Particularly during this political time, Scott emphasized the tendency for transgender people to feel isolated.

"The outside world would have us believe that we are alone. That's an intentional strategy," Scott said. "And I'm not here to tell you that it gets better, because that's a damaging message. But I am here to say it can be different and that we are not alone."

"One of the ways you can engage in your community –– you should engage in your community –– is to ask for help," Sammel said. "A take from my friend is that it is anti-community to not ask for help. And what they mean by that is this idea that you spread joy when you help, so asking for help is an opportunity for that. Asking for help is a way for all of us to be stronger

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SCIENCE FICTION WRITER KIM STANLEY ROBINSON WILL DELIVER 2026 COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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experience that would later inform his writing. He began writing fiction in the 1980s after discovering science fiction as a college student and has since been a prominent advocate for the genre, which he has described as one of the most powerful literary forms.

Robinson earned a bachelor's degree in literature from the University of California, San Diego, in 1974 and later received a master's degree in English from Boston University. He returned to UC San Diego to complete his PhD in English in 1982, writing his dissertation on the work of science fiction author Philip K. Dick, whose 1968 novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" inspired the film Blade Runner.

Having published over 20 novels, he was awarded the acclaimed science fiction and fantasy Nebula Award for his 2013 novel, 2312. The novel focuses on a fantasy space society in which humans are spread throughout the solar system. The New Yorker has called him "one of the greatest living science-fiction writers and one of the most important political writers working in America today."

His most recent novel, The Ministry for the Future, published in 2020, follows a fictional government body tasked with protecting the welfare of future generations, which often encounters climate change as the most significant challenge for this society.

His work often draws on personal experience and scientific collaboration. Robinson conducted field research in Antarctica through National Science Foundation grants, which informed his novel Antarctica, and his close relationships with scientists — including his wife, research chemist Lisa Howland Nowell — have shaped his nuanced portrayals of scientific communities.

Beyond his literary career, Robinson has been invited to speak at major international forums, including the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, the Summit of the Future and the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Belém, Brazil. His work has also been translated into more than 30 languages, and in 2016, asteroid 72432 was named in his honor.

Robinson will receive a Doctor of Humane Letters at Commencement.

Last year's speaker, Chuck Davis, CEO of the private equity firm Stone Point, drew some criticism from the graduating class.

"I am really excited for the commencement speaker because it's refreshing. Based on who last year's speaker was, I felt like the ethos and the career trajectory of last year did not match what Middlebury's state admission is on the website, and the values that President Baucom talks about," Daniza Tazabekova '26 said in an interview to The Campus.

Tazabekova was part of the committee that helped select the commencement speaker last fall, alongside one other student, two faculty members and Executive Vice President and Provost, Michelle McCauley.

"I was generally satisfied with the process of picking the speaker. It was inherently democratic, and there was a nomination form that went out and openly invited nominations from all community members to submit one," Tazabekova added. "That being said, I think the process could be done a little earlier, like maybe even the year before. I think we should leverage our Middlebury network more to get possibly alumni who've made a really big impact come back and speak."

Middlebury will also award honorary degrees to several individuals recognized for their contributions across education, medicine and journalism.

Among them is Shabana Basij-Rasikh '11, founder of the School of Leadership, Afghanistan (SOLA), the first and only boarding school for Afghan girls. After the Taliban's return to power in 2021, Basij-Rasikh led the evacuation of her school community to Rwanda, where the school continues to operate and expand. Many SOLA graduates have enrolled at Middlebury College.

"I had no idea that she [Basij-Rasikh] was a Middlebury alumni, and so it was so inspiring, ... to know that the founder and the director of the first girls school in Afghanistan before the Taliban took over was a Middlebury alum," Tazabekova said. "I think she is the embodiment of Middlebury's values, global mission, and the democratic ethos that you need to go out and make the world a better place than when you came in."

Andrea Green, a pediatrician and professor at the University of Vermont's Larner College of Medicine, will also be honored for her work supporting immigrant and refugee families through community-based health initiatives.

Additionally, Angelo Lynn, the owner, editor and publisher of the Addison County Independent, will receive an honorary degree for his leadership in local journalism.

"I couldn't imagine a better capstone to my 42-year career as an editor-publisher at the Addison Independent," Lynn wrote in an email to the Campus. "I've received many professional awards from my newspaper colleagues and peers throughout New England, but to have Middlebury College recognize what this lifetime of work has meant to the community is the highest of all honors."

Commencement is scheduled for May 24 on McCullough Lawn.

FROM KENYA TO VERMONT: HOW KENSAP IS RESHAPING ACCESS TO MIDDLEBURY

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alumni and American teachers, who prepare students for the college admissions process and provide them with classes most American students take.

"Each summer, our interns come to KenSAP to teach college-style classes, easing students into what university life will feel like. This preparation is critical, as the Kenyan high school curriculum leaves many students underprepared for the interactive classroom style of a U.S. university experience," Davidson said.

"They taught us literature, helped us prepare for the SATs, both math and English," said Mohamed Noor '27, who enrolled at Middlebury through KenSAP.

Noor's residential program occurred partially online, following sporadic election violence in Kenya in 2022.

"There was an election, so everyone had to go back to their homes and participate virtually," said Noor.

The residential program is fully funded for students. KenSAP primarily relies on the colleges it works with to cover the costs of attendance for its students. It also raises funds in the United States, Canada and Kenya to cover the costs of its recruitment, residential program, and visa and travel fees.

"The most exciting thing is that our alumni are supporting us. Last year, they raised $112,000 through their own contributions, donations from friends and family and corporate matching gifts," Davidson added.

The residential program covers boarding, food, entertainment and supplementary costs.

"They give you pocket money [for the residential program] if you have necessities and you don't have money, so they're very, very accommodating," Emmy Napao '26 said.

Following the residential program, KenSAP students are placed in internships in Nairobi, while asynchronously preparing to move to the United States.

A central focus of KenSAP's work is supporting high-need students in Kenya who would not otherwise have access to higher education, both locally and abroad. Usually, the organization receives upwards of 2,000 applications per year and eventually selects around 20 students for its residential program.

COURTESY PHOTO / MOHAMED NOOR

Director Alan Davidson (second from left), Mohamed Noor '27 (fourth from left), Emmy Napao '26 (fifth from left) and two other KenSAP alumni at last fall's TedX event. Noor was the student speaker and discussed his journey to Middlebury, including KenSAP.

Napao, who achieved the highest KCSE (Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education) score in the Kenyan county of Turkana, did not know about KenSAP until she was spotted by a KenSAP student in a magazine featuring her results.

"I got a call from someone who went to school in Turkana, where I am from, who had applied to KenSAP and was going to Davidson College. He told me, I've seen your results, and I think you should also look into this program, it's called KenSAP," Napao said in an interview with The Campus. "I started applying with his help; I didn't even have a phone at the time. I used to go to the nearest cyber cafe and do my application."

Noor, who also achieved the highest result in the northwestern province of Mandera, learned about KenSAP after participating in a different post-high-school program.

"I sent KenSAP my KCSE results slip via WhatsApp. The first thing I received was, 'Which school do you go to?' I replied, Mandera Secondary School, and then the next thing was they just wsent me the form, and they were like, fill in this form, and then send it by tomorrow. They gave me 12 hours," Noor added.

For Middlebury College, KenSAP is a trusted long-term partner that helps connect the college with students who would not otherwise hear of it.

"[KenSAP] allows us to find students in areas around the world we wouldn't be able to travel to, especially rural areas. We tend to travel to more urban areas and go to schools where we'll see dozens of students. KenSAP ... spread[s] the Middlebury name in ways that we would not be able to accomplish otherwise," said Karen Bartlett, associate director of international admissions, in an interview with The Campus.

While the college has worked with KenSAP for over a decade, its relationship with the organization is not a fixed partnership and depends on the availability of annual funding for high-need international students.

"We never guarantee that we can admit a student who is nominated by KenSAP. Each year, we evaluate international students based on the financial aid that we have available and how well we think a student is prepared for Middlebury," added Bartlett.

KenSAP provides its students with the opportunity to select a college that aligns with their personal, professional and academic interests.

"They give you some college names, and ask you to look at all these different schools, what they offer, their locations, and you know, you can get to decide whether that's a good fit for you," Napao said. "I had two options, either Smith or Middlebury. I am from Turkana, which is very hot, and I wanted somewhere cold. I also went to a girls' high school and primary school, so I didn't want to go to an all-women school."

In addition to university application support, KenSAP also helps its students apply for valid Kenyan passports and US visas.

"I did not have a passport, like many students, so we applied for passports all together; they booked our appointment together," Napao said. "Getting a US visa appointment was hard. We used to be online checking whether there's an open spot, so you could grab an early appointment. I think I got my visa the day before I was supposed to travel."

The organization maintains a connection with its students even after they enroll in a US college and provides them with support after graduation.

"Our career development program offers support for as long as alumni need it. Even a decade after beginning their college access journey, many return home to Kenya, uncertain of where to start, and we're there to guide them." Davidson said.

"It's not just our CCI [Center for Careers and Internships] and our ISSS [International Students and Scholars Services] keeping an eye out for these students, but KenSAP also offers ongoing support, helping students network to find summer internships and jobs after graduation, so they are a helpful part of the student support network," Bartlett added.

In light of changing immigration requirements for international students, KenSAP is preparing for potential restrictions by diversifying its partnership with non-US colleges and increasing opportunities for its graduates to return to Kenya in the long term.

"Our primary focus has always been US university placement, and that remains true today. However, recent visa restrictions on some African countries have prompted us to think more expansively, and we are now actively exploring opportunities at universities in Canada, Hong Kong, Japan and Europe," Davidson noted.

KenSAP is one of the many organizations Middlebury works with to identify high-achieving international students. Some organizations the college has worked with on the African continent include the USAP Community School in Zimbabwe, Bridge to Rwanda, Gashora Girls School in Rwanda and Elimisha Kakuma in Kenya.

For the KenSAP students at Middlebury, the current six-student cohort provides a built-in support system as they navigate an unfamiliar environment.

"When one of us comes to Middlebury, we help them figure out things, like, if they want things as small as, like, getting, like, a phone through the SAS grant, academics, internships or even just finding a job on campus," Noor said. "I just try to pay back the support I received, and I will do that for any incoming KenSAP student."

DINING SERVICES OPENS 'THE DEN' IN ATHLETICS CENTER

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reported a 61% increase in sales from the last academic year, inclusive of sales from The Den thus far — it started to make sense to reconsider the springtime, when there has traditionally never been a concession stand.

"We were talking about expanding our concessions athletics offerings for some time now, and we wanted to offer something for the spring, knowing that our sales volume has kind of shifted," Edson continued.

Together, RFO Assistant Manager Andrew Davison and Assistant Director of Athletics Ali Paquette pitched the idea of The Den the week leading up to spring break. An opening day of March 31 meant they had less than a two-week turnaround. However, The Den surpassed opening day expectations and had to close early due to higher-than-anticipated traffic.

"Crazy. It was crazy... it is just one of those things where there was such a great turnout that I didn't order enough product," Davidson said. "I didn't know what was going to happen."

With less than a week of operation under their belt, The Den served approximately 100-120 people on its busiest days, according to Edson. Looking ahead, Edson hopes to explore weekend hours aligned with game schedules, offer a seating area, and possibly continue operating next fall.

"We're really all about serving you guys, the students, so we're just trying to find all the avenues that we can best do that for you guys," Edson said.

NOOR KHAN / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

RFO Assistant Manager Andrew Davison making protein bowls for the college's newest retail dining option, The Den. Located in the Athletics Complex, The Den sells healthy grab-and-go smoothies, bowls and more.

Decarbonization talk prompts reflection on Middlebury's own climate commitment

MET LY / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Professor Alex Barron's talk, hosted in Hillcrest, was attended by students, staff, and members of the larger Middlebury community.

By MET LY
News Editor

On March 17, the student-led Sunday Night Environmental Group (SNEG), partnering with the Climate Action Program (CAP), hosted a talk by Associate Professor of Environmental Science and Policy Alex Barron of Smith College, who discussed climate action in higher education institutions (HEIs).

"There's not a lot of scholarship on higher education and climate action and decarbonization, and Alex Barron is the leading scholar in the field," SNEG's team manager Lily Jensen '28 said in an interview with The Campus. "We thought it would be good to bring him in to see what [other institutions] are up to."

Barron's talk drew on his working paper, which argues for decarbonization over carbon neutrality as a framework for addressing climate change. While carbon neutrality — the model most HEIs, including Middlebury, subscribe to — allows institutions to offset emissions through mechanisms such as carbon credits, it does not necessarily require changes to the infrastructure producing those emissions. Decarbonization, by contrast, requires replacing combustion-based systems entirely.

His research found that some carbon-neutral institutions have increased their emissions since first reporting, relying on offsets to close the gap.

"I will take a good decarbonization plan over a rapid carbon neutrality commitment," Barron said. "You can't do this kind of infrastructure change overnight. You really have to be thinking about it."

On a slide highlighting colleges at the forefront of climate action, including peer institutions like Amherst and Swarthmore and larger universities like Michigan and UC Berkeley, Middlebury was notably absent.

"I came [to Middlebury] because of its environmental programs and its reputation, but to be candid, I do feel a little bit let down," Jensen said, reflecting on the college's commitments to climate action. "Middlebury has genuinely done a lot of great things to pioneer [climate action in HEIs], but my view is that we got a little bit complacent."

Environmentalist, author, and Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury, Bill McKibben hailed the college as being "in the vanguard of American colleges on global warming issues" back in 2006 when the college announced the construction of the biomass plant. It was one of the first institutions to declare carbon neutrality in 2016, and in 2019, Middlebury launched Energy2028, committing to a full transition to renewable energy, reduced energy consumption, and divestment from fossil fuels.

"Middlebury has taken early swings, and that's something to be proud of," CAP Director Minna Brown said in an interview with The Campus. "Is that the decision we would make today? Probably not."

"You can't just assume that bioenergy is carbon neutral," Barron said. He explained that the model isn't scalable as "you can't have every school burning bioenergy and still maintain land and forest," and "it is a much more uncertain climate benefit than fully decarbonizing campus infrastructure and running it on clean electricity." Biomass relies on combustion, and still produces emissions.

"Everyone will tell you it was awesome in 2009, but it's also been 15 years, and we haven't seen much movement to plan for that next phase," Jensen said.

The college's carbon-neutral status hinges significantly on its biomass plant. According to the Middway Report, the plan supplies two-thirds of the campus's thermal energy, which in turn accounts for 80% of the college's energy consumption.

The plant is approaching the end of its life in the mid-2030s, and no concrete replacement plan has been announced. This decision will determine the college's emissions profile for at least the next two decades. Barron noted that Middlebury is at an inflection point where the college "has enough space to plan for what to do before having to take the action."

"We are at another decision moment that is enabled by the urgency [of climate action] and the opportunity of a strategic planning process of a new president who wants to build on momentum," Brown said.

Brown and Jensen both participated in the working group on climate as part of that process. In its final report, the group called for a comprehensive plan to decarbonize campus infrastructure, though the recommendations remain under review as President Baucom's strategic plan is finalized.

"It's going to be exciting to see what comes out in early May when President Baucom releases the strategic plan with more details and priorities," Brown said. "It's going to be up to all of us [since] I don't think that there are decisions that are set."

Gaps in the college's emissions tracking further complicate its climate record. Barron's paper notes that Middlebury has not reported to the Sustainability Indicator Management and Analysis Platform (SIMAP) since 2017. As of this reporting, the college also does not hold an active Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS) rank, a benchmark for sustainability performance used by at least 685 HEIs.

Answering concerns of the higher upfront cost of decarbonization infrastructure, Barron said, "the whole idea of college is a long-term investment. It's expensive to go upfront, and it's disruptive, but we do that because we know it's the right thing to do in the long run. Higher education is one of the few institutions that thinks in these long-term scales — Middlebury has been around for a very long time — so [they] can appreciate these kinds of long-term investments."

Another stakeholder in the college's approach to climate is the broader community.

"I'd like to challenge the college to adopt a more visionary approach to climate action than what seems to be happening currently," Alice White '76, an appointed member of the Town of Middlebury Energy Committee, wrote in a message to The Campus. "The town looks to the college for leadership in climate matters. When the college is dragging its heels, the town feels supported in their own lack of attention to their greenhouse gas emission reduction goals."

"We see a lot of behavior at other institutions that I would characterize as suboptimal that would not happen if there were more scrutiny coming from students and other members of the campus community," Barron said. "Students have a real power to demand accountability and ambition in these transitions – especially in moments when we know something has to happen."

Editor's Note: Lily Jensen '28 is a staff writer for The Campus.

Queers and Allies hosts community panel for Transgender Day of Visibility

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together."

Sammel talked about how, more than feeling comfortable within community spaces, he tries to find ways to live cohesively within his own body.

"Doing jumping jacks when I have anxiety, or knitting to have that repetitive motion is relaxing," Sammel said. "Find a way somehow that feels good to your body to move or just exist, because it's so hard sometimes to get that connection with yourself as a trans person."

When asked how to best support transgender friends and family, many panelists said that being willing to do a simple Google search was crucial. Hansley, a trans woman and leader of Vergennes Pride, emphasized that this is a time when transgender people are already worried, and that it's important to remember that before sharing news that threatens the livelihoods of transgender individuals.

"To loved ones of trans folks, I would say educate yourself. And don't ask your loved ones to educate you, and assume that your loved ones are also watching the news," Hansley said.

In a time of pervasive threats to transgender rights, activists are fighting back. Michael Haley, an attorney at GLAD Law, is involved in numerous transgender rights cases, including challenging the Trump administration's ban on transgender service members in the Military and Medicaid blocks for transgender people. Hayes emphasized his work in overturning and working around these federal rulings in the states of Vermont, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

"We're working a lot in State Legislators," Hayes said. "For five out of six states, we're working with state legislators who want to do good things for the transgender populations."

In one case, Hayes outlined, the Air Force offered transgender service members early retirement in order to avoid a fight regarding their removal. Although 18 transgender service members accepted the offer, the government withheld their retirement benefits and required they go through the involuntary separation process, denying the pension and healthcare they had been offered.

"To qualify in the first place, they had to be there for at least 15 years," Hayes said. "They would raise their hand to say, 'I would die for this country, the people,' and to tear away from them the retirements that they had earned and were already awarded is so beyond cruel."

Hayes and his team continue to fight against policies that restrict transgender rights, and he is hopeful that public sentiment is changing to oppose the federal legislation.

"People are seeing that some of these things are beyond the pale — cruel attacks — and people don't want to feel like they're a cruel person," Hayes said.

For the public at Middlebury, Anzalone hoped that this panel would create a space for the community and offer both transgender folks and allies a forum to learn and ask questions.

"There are a lot of spaces on campus that we provide for queer people, but there are not as many spaces for people who are just curious or people who don't know much to learn in a neutral environment," Anzalone said.

"It was really nice to see the trans adults in the Middlebury and wider Vermont community," Zeon Waterhouse '28 said. "Having that representation, especially because older adult representation is really hard to find, was really cool to see."

EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAM PROVIDES AFTER-SCHOOL CARE TO LOCAL STUDENTS

By ANNA DOUCET
Staff Writer

For more than 12 years, the Mt. Abraham Unified School District's Expanded Learning Program has provided care for children from Preschool through 12th grade, offering various workshops as well as engaging, educational programming in the form of after-school care and camps during school vacations and summer.

The Expanded Learning Program (ELP) was originally intended to offer extracurricular workshops to elementary school students. The Mt. Abraham Unified School District, currently composed of schools in the towns of Bristol, Starksboro, New Haven and Monkton, has traditionally had lower academic performance than other schools in Vermont.

Additionally, many students in the Mt. Abraham Unified School District face complex challenges, according to Mandy Chesley-Park, the Co-Director of ELP. Depending on the school, 40-70% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. A significant portion of the students qualify for housing and food assistance. Nearly 30% of incoming kindergartners have lacked access to high-quality early education opportunities. ELP was strategically organized to combat the challenges that rural communities, particularly rural schools, face, shared by Chesley-Park.

Over the years, ELP has continued to expand to better meet the increased demand for childcare and extracurricular activities. Now, the afterschool programs alone serve approximately 350 students per day, while ELP's summer camp serves approximately 175 students per day for six weeks. During programming, ELP offers more than fifty enrichment workshops, including an Iron Chef team, visits from Circus Smirkus, Tae Kwon Do classes, and introductions to languages such as Spanish and French. ELP also presents several musicals a year for older students. In 2025, ELP opened their first high school program.

"For the first time, we were able to offer high school students real opportunities like internships, robotics and [a] ski and snowboard club, and that is something we have wanted for a long time," Chesley-Park said.

She also explained that ELP is supported by a staff of more than 80, some of whom are students at the college. For students interested in education, community engagement or conflict transformation, ELP complements well.

Sam Merriam '26 began working for ELP at Bristol Elementary in the fall of 2025. He now works between three and four afternoons a week, primarily with kids in second through sixth grade.

"I get paid to play soccer, organize craft challenges, build Legos and plan activities that a group of kids will find exciting, engaging, and boost their excitement in learning. Doing things that I enjoy while helping them work through challenges and bad days is really rewarding," Merriam said in an interview with The Campus.

Jackson Mckersie '26 also works at ELP. He says his job has provided him with many learning opportunities.

"It has been an educational experience in the way that it has taught me how to better handle conflicts and people," Mckersie said. "Being around the kids and families has opened my eyes to the local community beyond the students and faculty I normally encounter at Middlebury College. I have a newfound respect for the people who live here their whole lives and their experiences."

Because Mt. Abraham Unified School District is relatively small, there is also a strong community built around the schools. Through the program, college students can engage with the local community in a meaningful way.

"I think there's a certain onus, in a very positive way, to work together and help each other out," Merriam added.

Chesley-Park agreed, telling The Campus that one of ELP's goals is to engage with the local community as much as possible to enhance programming.

"ELP is really built through the community. It is not something we run on our own. We partner with a wide range of local organizations, from libraries and farms to the recreation department, arts organizations, and even the police and fire departments. Each of those partnerships brings something different for kids, whether that is access to outdoor spaces, creative work, mentorship or real world experiences," Chesley-Park shared.

COURTESY PHOTO/ EXTENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

Kids at the ELP afterschool program participate in an outdoor activity.

Program staff help uphold the community connections through their everyday work with local children. Eleanor Harrison '26 has worked with ELP for nearly two years, allowing her to build deep relationships with the children in her classrooms.

"I've found that several kids make incredible progress developmentally and behaviorally when there's consistent support from adults like us in their lives. As a staff member, I feel like I have the opportunity to engage with these kids and build real bonds with them separate from the regular school day and from their home lives, and it's been very fulfilling to experience."

At the end of the day, ELP hopes to give back to the community that offers so much support to the program.

"What matters to me is that none of this is one direction. These are ongoing relationships. Students might be learning on a farm one day, working with artists the next or getting support through relationships that extend beyond the school day. At the same time, we are trying to build something that gives back, something that actually reflects and supports the community it comes from," Chesley-Park said.

PHOTOPLACE GALLERY OPENS 'MADE BY HAND' ANALOG

By IZZY RONDA
Local Editor

On Friday, April 3, the PhotoPlace Gallery opened the 'Made by Hand' exhibition, an analog exhibit curated by juror Christina Anderson, a professor at Montana State University. The exhibit's opening reception drew local residents, Middlebury College students, and several artists featured in this month's exhibition, and is on display until April 25.

Zach Hoffman, the owner of the PhotoPlace Gallery, hosts openings at the start of each month. He shared that last month's exhibit, "Cut, Paste, Transform," focused on collage photography.

This month, the theme is analog photography, also known as film photography, which is a traditional process that uses light-sensitive, chemical-based film to capture images instead of digital sensors.

"Some of them are created with the digital images but printed in chemicals and processes that aren't printed," Hoffman said, in reference to the pieces hung in the gallery. "Some are made without cameras, so they are just chemicals and light and substance, and then processed with chemicals that make them stay that way. It's almost like painting with light."

"Made by Hand" features a total of 75 images, 30 of which are displayed in the gallery, with the remainder included in a digital exhibition. Each work is also documented in a small book organized alphabetically, with an index and links to the artists' personal websites, ensuring all participants are represented regardless of whether their work is physically displayed in the gallery.

Christina Anderson, who was Hoffman's professor during his undergraduate studies at Montana State University, explores contemporary vanitas through a range of alternative photographic processes, including gum and casein bichromate, cyanotype, salted paper, and platinum-palladium. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in more than 130 shows and featured in over 90 publications. She has also authored six instructional books on these processes, which have sold in more than 40 countries.

Hoffman explained that Anderson's role as the juror in the curation of the exhibit has been crucial. Generally, a juror's position in the curation of a gallery is to select and curate the photos submitted.

"She went through all the submissions, we have anywhere from two to three hundred people each month submitting, and she goes through the images, selects what she wants to hang, and then what she wants to do online," Hoffman said.

Artists featured in the entire exhibit include Ann Wenzel, Michelle Robinson, Brian Powers, Barbara Riley, and Leah Macdonald.

"Work is not chosen in a vacuum but in relation to all other entries. After multiple times of visiting all three folders to where I am satisfied with my choices, I create intermediate folders, something like Yes, If There Is Room, Maybe, Favorite Nos, and Probably OK to eliminate," writes Anderson in the Juror's Statement displayed on the PhotoPlace Gallery's website.

In the gallery, a projector displayed a rotating selection of Anderson's chosen works, casting the images onto a blank white wall.

Hoffman explained that the submission process is primarily conducted online.

"Everything is run through our website, so basically you make a profile, you can submit to whatever is open for submissions and then once that closes, the juror gets all the images and has two weeks to go through them all and then makes the selections, and then they get the work and then we hang the show and then we have our opening reception," Hoffman said.

He added that the submission process offers artists a valuable opportunity to have their work reviewed by experts in the field, such as Anderson, and to better understand where it fits within the broader photography world. The exhibit features a mix of established artists, including professors and teachers, as well as more amateur artists exploring what it means to present their work in gallery settings.

The opening reception of "Made by Hand" drew a range of attendees, including local residents, featured artists, and students from the college.

"Tonight there were, I think, four or five artists who came: some people even came from Texas," said Hoffman. "Some of them were just seeing the sign on Main St. and coming in, we had the a acapella group [the Mischords] here earlier tonight," Hoffman said.

The types of people who filter through the PhotoPlace Gallery vary: during parents' weekend, lots of Middlebury College families and students will stop by, and during the winter and ski season, skiers will pop in to take a look around.

"Hopefully with all the events happening this summer, we'll get a lot more foot traffic," Hoffman said.

Gabby Stuart '26 spoke in an interview with the campus about walking past the sign on Main St. as well.

"The other day I was walking into town, and I saw the sign for the PhotoPlace gallery opening, and it reminded me that I went to that same art gallery with my mom earlier in the year when she was visiting here," Stuart said. "It made me excited to go explore this month's art exhibit."

IZZ RONDA / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

"Made by Hand" features a total of 75 images, 30 of which are displayed in the gallery, with the remainder included in a digital exhibition.

Since he purchased the gallery in January of 2025, Hoffman has been aiming to publicize the business and its general mission.

"Since I took ownership, I have really been pushing to reach out locally with the publications and just working on getting a flier that I can hand out to the local inns, letting them know there's a gallery. Basically just telling them what we do," Hoffman said.

"I have also partnered with Little Seed Coffee, and so after each exhibit comes down, I take five or so images over to them. They are already in frames, so they don't have to worry about it: I've got a hanging system, so it's easy enough for me, and for them, they don't have to deal with anything," Hoffman said.

"Made by Hand" highlights both the interesting craft of analog photography and PhotoPlace Gallery's role in Middlebury's artistic landscape. Hoffman continues to work on his own photography projects as well as with other jurors on future exhibition ideas, sharing that he is working with a local night-sky photographer to do an upcoming exhibit.

‘POWERSUITS’ BRINGS INTERPRETIVE DANCE AND COMEDY TO TOWN HALL THEATER

By DYLAN MCGINTY
Staff Writer

On Friday, April 3, the Town Hall Theater hosted POWERSUITS, a comedy production including elements of both dance and music, written and performed by Michole Biancosino ’98, associate Professor of theater, and Lida Winfield, assistant professor of dance. Entirely composed by the duo, the performance simultaneously made the packed audience laugh and offered up subtle social commentary on broader themes such as capitalism, gender, and consumerism.

POWERSUITS has been a year-and-a-half-long project for the two professors, which premiered in June of 2025 at Project Y’s Women in Theater Festival, co-founded by Biancosino, and has been performed in several locations, such as the University of Vermont, as well as the Northampton Center for the Arts.

The show, which incorporates physicality and dialogue between the two actors, revolves around portraying the experience of women in positions of power and challenging gender roles. The show does not have a linear plot, as the performers emphasize the interpretiveness of the performance itself to deliver the work’s thematic impact.

Structured improvisation plays a large role in their performance, a process in which actors incorporate spontaneous reactions into the broad framework, also known as the ‘score’ of the performance.

“The skill of improvisation is to learn how to listen, how to respond to what is happening in front of you, how to compose dance or theater in that context,” Winfield said in an interview with The Campus.

Biancosino grew up in Princeton, NJ, as the daughter of a professional musician and music teacher. In 1999 she founded Project Y in Washington, D.C., an award-winning theater company now based in New York City. Biancosino is particularly interested in developing new plays and curating ideas until they become professional premieres. Every summer, she hires small teams of Middlebury students to work as interns at Project Y. Since 2014, she has also led an annual Women in Theater Festival, aiming to expand opportunities for women in the theater industry.

Winfield, an alumna of The School of New Dance Development in Amsterdam and Goddard College in Vermont, describes herself as an interdisciplinary artist working across dance, theater, storytelling and visual art. Winfield has performed at events such as the 2019 Bates Dance Festival and the Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival in western Massachusetts. Alongside her performing career, she has taught at institutions such as MindMingle, an experiential school in New Delhi and at the National Dance Association Conference. After teaching a J-Term course, Winfield eventually became a full-time professor at the College; passionate about both producing and teaching dance, she chaired Middlebury’s Dance department from 2021 to 2024.

Biancosino and Winfield began teaching at Middlebury College in 2016, where they first met. At the Clifford Symposium in 2018, both performers created an event inspired by “Recitatif,” Toni Morrison’s only short story. This production brought together students, alumni and professionals in a thought-provoking performance that addressed themes of racial and social divides through the performing arts.

COURTESY PHOTO/ EVELYN RODRIGUEZ

This past Friday, “POWERSUITS”, a show put on by Middlebury faculty members Michole Biancosino and Lida Winfield, was nearly sold out at the Town Hall Theater.

The duo emphasized the importance of connection with each other and with the audience to deliver the performance well.

“Sometimes we have this idea that you’re teaching one way and making work in another way, but for me, those are interconnected,” Winfield said. “I want to be with an audience, not just in front of an audience.”

During the show, Biancosino and Winfield interacted with the crowd and used the space liberally, delivering a truly immersive performance. To engage the audience, they often observed crowd reactions and tastes and adapted the show accordingly.

“There’s a conversation between us and the audience,” Biancosino said. “It doesn’t mean we’ll completely change the show, but we are aware of them. We talk to you and interact with you.”

During the talkback after the show’s conclusion, one audience member commented on the show’s relevance, noting that the performance subtly addresses social themes.

“We don’t say the underlying things, but they’re there,” Biancosino said. “The audience is thinking about their government, or their relationship to power, but we don’t make any explicit statement about that.”

“I thought it was a truly riveting performance,” Alison Mott, an audience member, said. “Their Gen X music was delightful, and they’ve really mastered the physical comedy aspect — both have such intelligent humor.”

With the help of Graydon Hanson ’25, the stage manager for POWERSUITS, the duo prepared for each performance by organizing their prop-heavy setup and grounding themselves.

“I always lay on the ground of the theater stage to put a lot of sound into my body, to feel the vibration of my body on the floor. You want to have your feet on the ground so you’re not in your head, so I try to feel very planted and make eye contact with Lida,” Biancosino said.

Outside of performing, both professors speak highly of the College’s arts offerings and recommend that students consider enrolling in a class such as their Creative Process course, an introductory course that welcomes exploration and experimentation.

Additionally, Biancosino highlighted her directing class as transformative for students, noting the transferable skills taught such as leadership and navigating group dynamics.

“Many students in it are not there because they think they could, should, or would be a director, but you learn a lot of skills about how to lead a room, how to collaborate at the same time as being in charge,” Biancosino said.

Future plans for the duo include bringing POWERSUITS to Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the world’s largest performing arts festival, this summer. The duo also plans to continue adding new sections to the show and innovating the script, making small tweaks with every performance.

“This is what feminist art looks like. We’re excited about it, and we’re eager to keep bringing it out to our community,” Biancosino said.

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A PERSONAL CASE FOR ZEITGEIST

Op-Ed

Mandy Berghela *is a member of the class of 2026 and Editor in Chief of The Campus.*

The first time "Zeitgeist" showed up in my inbox, I almost ignored it. It was my first year at Middlebury, and the word meant nothing to me. But I clicked the link out of curiosity. As I read through the questions, I was struck by how different they felt from the ones institutions usually ask. They reflected the kind of questions and conversations I was having with my close friends.

So what exactly is Zeitgeist, why should you take it and why did it have such an impact on me?

Zeitgeist, by definition, refers to the defining spirit or mood of a particular moment—captured through the ideas and beliefs of the people living in it.

On Monday, March 30, The Middlebury Campus released its eighth annual Zeitgeist survey, available to students at go/zeitgeist. The survey features 60 questions such as: How often do you use A.I. in your classes? How satisfied are you with the romantic scene at Middlebury? This year, the Campus also introduced questions directly on students' sense of purpose and belonging: Do you feel academically fulfilled? Are you proud to be a "Panther"? Do you have faith in the future of Middlebury?

I remember my first year, in April 2023, reading through Zeitgeist 5.0 results when they were released. I felt a certain level of confirmation scrolling through the data. There were certain patterns that stood out to me that had honestly validated my Middlebury experience. One section, which showed who works paid jobs on campus by financial aid status, made visible a divide I was already living as a low-income, first-generation student. Another showed disparities in who has access to a car on campus, again along financial aid lines.

These were conversations I had often with close friends in similar situations, but they rarely extended beyond those spaces. Outside of that, they were not widely acknowledged. I remember once sitting in Proctor and hearing someone ask, "Wait, people actually use the bus to get to Burlington?" For me, that Tri-Valley Transit bus has always been my primary way of getting there. I remember another moment in class when someone was unfamiliar with what food stamps were and the explanation that followed revealed how different our starting points were, and probably how different our Middlebury experience is. Casual mentions of family support or financial safety nets are certainly common, often without recognition that not everyone has them. I do believe that there is an underlying assumption of shared access—whether that means having a car or disposable income—and as Zeitgeist data reveals, that assumption does not hold true for everyone.

This is why Zeitgeist matters. What might otherwise remain anecdotal or unseen becomes visible when it is collected across the student body and translated into something everyone can engage with; something that can inform real dialogue and change. This is possible because Zeitgeist is completely anonymous. Responses are analyzed in aggregate, meaning no individual answer can be traced back to a specific person, and the data is not shared with the college, faculty or any outside organization. That anonymity matters. It allows students to answer honestly about experiences that are often difficult to name publicly, such as financial realities, belonging, access and well-being without that fear of judgment or consequences.

We are living in a moment where data increasingly shapes how we understand our experiences. Across disciplines, information is collected, interpreted and used to tell stories. Zeitgeist operates on this same principle. Using tools like Qualtrics and Datawrapper, we take the thousands of anonymous individual student responses and transform them into a broader, more honest picture of student life at the college. Not the polished version we always see presented in admissions brochures, but the one students are actually living.

That distinction matters to me. There are questions the college is unlikely to ask directly—about the political climate on campus, who has access to a car, or the more personal realities of students' romantic and sexual lives. This stuff matters too, and in fact, is probably the most interesting. And while the college certainly collects its own data, it is not always shared in full. Zeitgeist is different as its findings are published regardless of how they reflect the college or its students. That transparency is part of what gives it value.

Last year, former Editor in Chief Ryan McElroy '25 put it well: "The value of Zeitgeist is not only as a passing curiosity or pure entertainment. Rather, the survey represents our best effort to make an empirical, quantitative study of the Middlebury student body at a specific moment in time."

In practice, that means the strength of Zeitgeist depends on participation. The story the data tells is shaped by who contributes to it, and a dataset is only as meaningful as the range of experiences it captures.

After three years on staff—and now, in my fourth year taking Zeitgeist as Editor in Chief—I do see it as more than a survey. It is one of the few tools we have to represent student experiences both quantitatively and qualitatively. That responsibility, however, does not rest with The Campus alone. It depends on student participation. Whether your experience aligns with dominant assumptions about campus life or not, it is part of the picture. And the more students who participate, the more accurate and more representative that picture becomes. Last year, 1,028 students responded out of an on-campus population of 2,563. That is a significant number, but it should be higher.

Zeitgeist takes less than 10 minutes to complete.

Take it.

ALL WORK AND NO PLAY

Op-Ed

Zach Marcus *is a member of the class of 2026.5.*

A couple years ago, I had a professor who started each class by introducing an "AI tool" and having us fiddle around with it. Write a nonsense poem satirizing the musical Hamilton in Lewis Carroll's voice, I'd type in, and the program would barf out some metrically-challenged slop. Make me a Marc Chagall-style painting of the Iron Dome, and the machine would produce a hilariously over-saturated image of a Star of David floating in the sky, with angels draped in Israeli flags flying underneath. The purpose of these exercises, according to the professor's syllabus, was simple: "AI tools are here," he giddily announced. "There's no going back, and they're pretty cool. Let's not be Luddites... This is your future."

Strange, you might be thinking, to hear that sort of triumphalist rhetoric from a professor and not someone who works in Silicon Valley and has a financial interest in creating viral hype. These days, though, that's the direction Middlebury is heading. Just this past J-Term, MiddCore partnered with OpenAI to explore "ethical and productive uses of ChatGPT" (next year, I believe Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf are partnering up to discuss ethical eating). In the beginning, AI usage was confined to shameless or sheepish students who were too lazy to do their work. Now, it is more common than not that I take a class which allows or encourages its use. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em, isn't that what they say?

When asked to justify the partnership, the director of MiddCore reasoned that "AI tools have become ubiquitous across industries... avoiding AI entirely is going to increasingly limit how effectively people can participate in the workforce." My professor made a very similar argument: "Generative AI, like other tools used appropriately, can increase the efficiency and productivity of your labor... People who know how to use these tools well will be at a significant competitive advantage over those who do not." (It's cute that they keep calling them tools, like we're working on a garage project or something.)

What these explanations reveal is that for the pro-AI crowd, Middlebury's primary purpose is to serve as a waystation on students' journey into the professional world. The goal of the college is to equip students with the skills, credentials, and connections necessary to launch a successful career after graduation. According to this view, education is purely instrumental, a means to an end. Output matters more than input. For instance, at the end of the semester, my professor excitedly reported that all of our class's projects were better than the best projects he'd received before we could automate (excuse me, augment) the assignment with AI. Never mind that they all looked exactly the same, never mind that we almost certainly didn't retain the material; they really did look pretty.

This view of a college's purpose is an example of what the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe as capitalism's "deterritorializing" instinct, by which they mean its tendency to dissolve and commodify every non-market structure it comes into contact with. Where once we were students, now we are consumers; where once the college was an educational institution with a mission, now it is a supplier who must offer an enticing product. This process helps explain recent outgrowths like the CCI, with their tiresome propagandizing on behalf of well-heeled employers, as well as ResLife and all the other parts of the sprawling internal bureaucracy performing "bullshit jobs" with their clear corporate parallels. Phenomena like rampant grade inflation is another internalization of market logic — remember, the customer is always right! Even student activism, ostensibly the most radical element of campus life, is conditioned by the college's neoliberalization. Have you noticed how often student protestors sound like petulant customers angry about how their money is being spent? Wasn't it not too long ago when the aim of student protests was to create institutions ungovernable by the exchange of services for money? AI is simply the culmination of the college's commodification, the automation required to cut labor costs and boost productivity.

"Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation," Deleuze and Guattari ask in Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Are they right — have our desires been truncated and deformed to the point where we willingly accept the bastardized version of education that the AI boosters offer? If all we can imagine college to be is a human capital factory churning out capable and docile workers we should just automate the whole thing. Make it a nice closed loop, machines talking to machines. It's already happening: I took a class a couple semesters ago where the professor generated their AI usage policy using Claude. Perfect meaninglessness; the mask starting to eat the face.

Once, we had the idea that the college was a place that worked differently from the rest of the economy. Here we could build a community dedicated to knowledge and learning. Students and professors thinking side by side, doing what makes us most human and doing it together. At its best, the college is the most radical utopia we have, both a model and an investigation of a better world. Its only end should be to provide a true education, to allow students to live as their fullest and most equal selves. A place where AI-augmented essays and LinkedIn and all things instrumental, external, and acquisitive have no place. We could have that again; maybe AI will even help. Because no matter what OpenAI or MiddCore or anybody says, you know when you're using AI that you're demeaning yourself, that it's wrong to outsource your ability to think to a next-token prediction machine. You read those rote, lifeless sentences which mean nothing and you'll forget instantly, and you cringe. Good. That's a start.

Emilo
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173 Court Street, Middlebury, VT
Roxanna Emilo, Broker/Realtor/Owner
(802) 349-9837
Christine Fraioli, Realtor
(802) 989-2234
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THE FINAL STRETCH, RECONSIDERED

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

As the weather finally warms up (forgetting this Tuesday's snow), students finally begin to trade parkas, mittens and wool hats for lighter layers. The College emerges from its winter routine as Adirondack chairs fill Battell Beach and McCullough lawn once again. Students rush to get a coveted seat at the few tables outside the dining halls.

As the snow recedes, it leaves behind the mud and dirt that define a Middlebury spring. As we enter the second-to-last month of the academic year, the Editorial Board reflected on what this spring transition brings to campus.

Spring, in many ways, feels earned, and reminds us about what makes going to college in the Northeast so unique. After long months of short days and no sunlight, even small shifts in temperature are significant. Other college students in southern California or Florida would not understand this feeling; it is a unique and defining characteristic of an education in New England. At a time when the world, and in fact our campus, can feel fractured, sharing in the joys of sunny days and higher temperatures feels like a uniting, and uniquely Middlebury, feeling.

At the same time, spring marks one of the busiest times of the year, and reminds us about all the different kinds of people at Middlebury. The season contains many religious and cultural holidays, such as Easter, Passover, Eid, and Holi. Students have the opportunity to share their traditions and celebrate together, a testament to the season's camaraderie.

It is also the season for the arts: Hepburn Zoo performances, senior thesis showcases and events like the Nocturne Arts Festival, which brings students together to highlight a year's worth of creative work.

The changing season also encourages us to examine Vermont outside of its winter chill. As the days of skiing and sledding are behind us, we are reminded about what makes Vermont so special, even without its trademark snow. Whether this means walking at The Knoll or swimming in Lake Dunmore, students are drawn back outside. This relationship with the environment is central to the Middlebury experience. Integrating academic life with that environment — through outdoor classes for example — can make learning feel more immediate and dynamic.

Still, spring is not without its challenges. The weather is inconsistent; a warm day is often followed by rain, clouds or even late snow. Rather than a clean transition, the season arrives in fits and starts. Adjusting expectations becomes part of the process.

More significantly, the academic calendar compresses some of the most enjoyable weeks of the year into a period of heightened stress. As finals approach, students are asked to balance academic responsibilities with a desire to be present and engaged. Burnout becomes more visible, and the pace of the semester can make even small tasks feel overwhelming.

While academics remain a priority, we emphasized the importance of balance. Taking time outside, even briefly, can offer a reset. Being a strong student does not require constant productivity, and rest should not feel like an afterthought.

At an institutional level, the College can do more to support this balance. Increased outdoor seating and gathering spaces would better accommodate how students naturally use the campus in warmer weather. This is low-hanging fruit; it would make for good photo ops, too. When the sun is out, students gravitate toward the outdoors — but too often, space is limited.

There is also room to reconsider how student gatherings are managed. We reiterate our previous call: The college needs to make it easier for students to plan events and shed its bureaucratic load. Student-led gatherings (like nocturne) are a meaningful part of campus life, particularly in a season that already feels fleeting.

As the semester enters its final stretch, we offer a few reflections on what to carry forward — and what to leave behind.

In: Living for every day, not just the weekend.

It is easy to fall into a cycle of counting down to Friday, but that mindset can flatten the rest of the week. Spring offers opportunities for smaller, everyday moments — whether that means swimming for an hour between the meeting and class, going to Shiretown for a creemee, or just hanging out more with friends. Thursday, Friday and Saturday are not the only days of the week.

Out: Disrespecting public spaces.

Warm weather does not mean that all sense of responsibility should be thrown out the window. This is a reminder to be respectful of public spaces. Do not vandalize public property, do not leave dining dishes outside, and, as always, we should clean up after ourselves.

In: Supporting your friends.

The spring ushers in spirited showcases of student talent, ranging from academic pursuits to artistic creativity. The Spring Symposium and Nocturne Arts Festival are just two examples of this period of celebration, demonstrating the importance of supporting and appreciating your friends and peers. Go watch a student play this weekend.

Out: Being too hard on yourself.

With finals approaching, it is important to remember not to be too hard on yourself. The human experience should not be devalued to a GPA or letter grade. Middlebury is an academic institution, but there is so much more to learn and experience beyond schoolwork. This is your permission to take a break and relax.

The Middlebury Campus

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Middlebury should take a stand against AI in education

Op-Ed

***Ben Conway** is a member of the class of 2026.*

Lately, Middlebury College has been acting confused. With the state of the world right now, who can blame it? The cost to provide a liberal arts education continues to rise, which is exacerbated by the Trump administration's war on higher education. We're in the process of breaking up with our long-distance partner in Monterey, which has been awkward but for the best. Meanwhile, in Vermont, Ian Baucom is crisscrossing our campus with the energy of a philosophical super-senior. What are we here for? he is asking. Our college? This whole thing called a liberal arts education?

Baucom's questions are necessary because something is changing. Many of the assignments that Midd's professors have been assigning since forever can now be done by Artificial Intelligence (AI). Sure, the writing it produces is often strange, it has an alarming tendency to make stuff up, and it's a tech product that comes with complicated ethical and environmental trade-offs. However, the fact remains that it is pretty good at debugging R code, summarising an academic article or writing a First-Year essay about the Peloponnesian War.

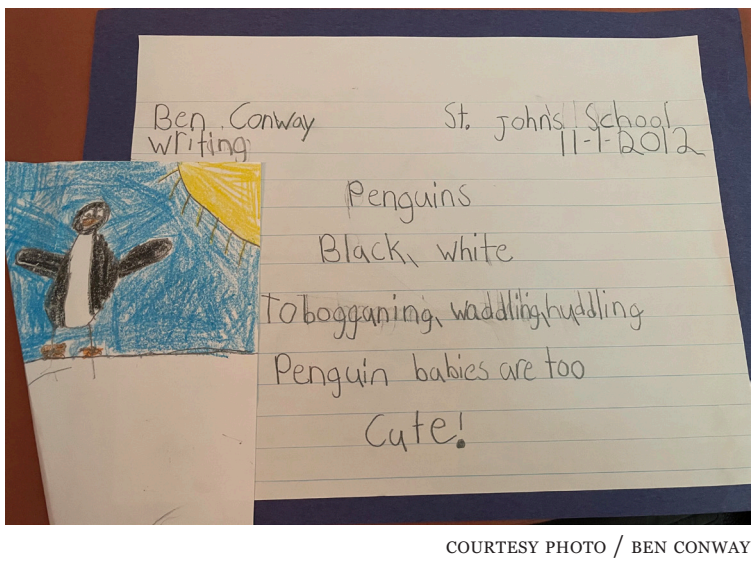
In the US, the proliferation of AI is a fait accompli, at least for now. However, it need not be one at Middlebury. I am disappointed with our milquetoast institutional response to AI, including our strategic plan, which calls for cautious integration of AI in education. I am very disappointed with professors who encourage students to purchase premium AI subscriptions for class, making things difficult for students who would rather opt out due to their personal beliefs about the technology and inequitable for those who must do so for money's sake. I am disappointed that MiddCORE, a program known for partnering students with socially impactful businesses, partnered with a company so unscrupulous that it has decided to allow erotica for its emotionally attached users (though it has since put those plans on hold). Most of all, I am disappointed in those who deny their own agency by arguing that Middlebury must accommodate an inevitable future of AI in education rather than doing the harder work of creating the best academic community with the incredible wealth of resources we have.

Defenders of AI in education will argue that AI can act as a thought partner to augment our thinking. They say it can help us generate ideas, automate the drudgework of formatting code and enable a shift to project-based learning, such as presentations. However, integrating AI into a Middlebury education implicitly means giving up some of our capabilities to a machine. In-class essays are fine, but they don't provide the same level of depth and exploration as a research paper. Using AI to debug your code means that you will have a weaker understanding of what's going on when the AI can't help you. Use a chatbot enough to generate ideas, and you will find you're less creative on your own. Giving up these capabilities is not in any of our interests: not the students and families who make sacrifices for an education, not the professors who got into this for the love of learning, and not even for the long-term interest of an institution focused on its own prestige.

Even though AI will surely be common in our jobs and lives, the purpose of an education lies in doing the work. To fully understand what an integral is, you need to do it manually and mechanically before you use a calculator. To get strong, you need to use your muscles to lift weights, not a forklift. To truly understand an argument, a worldview, a mathematical concept or scientific literature, you need to do the reading, writing and problem sets. Doing so will hopefully have additional benefits. You may gain a deeper understanding of what you believe in, along with the emotional maturity, diligence and humility needed to be successful after college. Ironically, these skills are only becoming more important as technology proliferates.

Through the honor code, our school has a norm against academic dishonesty. It's a weakened norm, but an important one. Students promise to follow the honor code, while the college is encouraged to provide us with the best educational resources it can. Professor Alison Stanger says that the college should embrace AI because the alternative is "[teaching] students to lie to us." In doing so, she attempts to derive a normative statement about how Middlebury should operate from a descriptive one, a fallacy that Hume warned us against centuries ago. Would Stanger also propose getting rid of Middlebury's honor code or parking regulations simply because most students fail to fully comply with them?

Just as we have the honor code, we must have a similar norm against the use of generative AI in our classes. Creating such a norm will take time, trust and cooperation. It may require dramatically reducing our use of technology at the institutional level. These are drastic measures that surely will not have universal approval; however, the threat to our students' capacity to learn is too great to do anything less. I hope that Middlebury's faculty, students and administration can take a stand against the use of AI in education. Doing so won't exactly answer the question of what Middlebury is for, but it will allow us to renew the commitment to academic excellence that's part of what makes this little ridge in Vermont so special.



COURTESY PHOTO / BEN CONWAY

One of the author's first writing assignments, in Nov. 2012.

‘THE LAST WALTZ’ TURNS 50

By NICK PENNIMAN
Contributing Writer

There’s a moment in “The Last Waltz” that comes at about the 34 minute and 53 second mark, at the onset of the last chorus in Neil Young’s performance of “Helpless,” which a friend of mine once singled out, when we were arguing the film’s best scenes, as a jib door to transcendence. He was listening to the recording of that performance one time — alone, outside in the snow, through headphones (did it help that he was under a certain kind of influence?) — and that moment was what took him there, he said. I knew what he was talking about. The verse is ending when Young looks sideways at The Band’s Robbie Robertson and Rick Danko, then looks again, and then, grinning, joins them at their microphone, while Joni Mitchell — somewhere off-stage, glimpsed in silhouette by Martin Scorsese’s camera moments before — finds the wild, wordless current of a high note and rides it above them all as Levon Helm tumbles into his symbol and the crowd’s shouted affection gathers to a crest and, for a few seconds, one collective sound of holy abandon rises out of that perfect chorus of three chords and a one-word refrain to level you.

The concert Scorsese captured in that film — The Band’s guest-filled farewell show, staged in San Francisco on Thanksgiving day, 1976 — is now fifty years old. Like anything you return to enough times, “The Last Waltz” registers, for me, less as “the most beautiful rock movie ever made” (though surely the critic Pauline Kael was right about that, and would be still) than as a collection of moments: a series of verses and phrases, inflections and glances alternately capable of throwing new light on the music.

Maybe that sounds overwrought. But search up the “Helpless” video on YouTube, and see how much there is in just that one performance: the way Rick Danko looks at Neil Young during the first few minutes, mouth slightly ajar, head slightly lowered, hound dog eyes locked in total capture — what do you call that kind of love? And what kind of bliss Robertson is feeling in the second verse, when he looks up at the ceiling of the Winterland Ballroom, with an awe as feigned as it is real, as if he’s looking at the “yellow moon on the rise” and the “big birds flying across the sky”? He and Danko turn to smile at Garth Hudson, who’s doing magic with the Lowrey organ, wheeling above the song like those blue-lit birds above Young’s nameless Ontario town, painting Young’s memory with the brush of his instrument. Robertson looks between him and the ceiling, shaking his head at the marvel of it all.

You can talk about the pining in the sound of Young’s harmonica (has he not done better with that instrument, in his own way, than anyone else?), or the off-handed imaginativeness of Robertson’s guitar playing, how he fills the space between the lyrics with anything but noodling, expresses himself in anything but licks. If you were really overdoing it, you could talk about the way Richard Manuel kicks in at the very beginning of the song, spreading it out with that wide, sonorous exhale that you only get from a low piano octave. And even before the song starts, there’s something moving about Young settling himself in the energy of the crowd and then saying to Robertson, with the self-assurance that must come from a life playing big shows, “Oh, they’ve got it now Robbie.” (Never mind the fact that he had a sizable lump of green room stardust stuck in his nose the whole performance — a real inconvenience to his manager, who went to great lengths to have Scorsese airbrush it out of the film’s final cut.)

More than half of this article’s prescribed word count already blown on one song. It’s too bad — you’d want to cover Van Morrison’s performance of “Caravan,” the moment when he and Robertson go in at the vamp section together and Robertson plays a phrase so nice Morrison has to just back off and say “yeah,” before plunging again into one of the most expressive, fully-exerted vocal performances you can find on video, capped with a series of leg kicks fired dangerously high above the waist, a winded “thank you” preceding the mic drop, and a final, hilarious skyward arm thrust as he makes his departure into the wings (all this in a sequined maroon jacket with matching pants).

Then you’d want to get to Joni Mitchell, really on a different plane than all the other men, as good as they are, in her performance of “Coyote” (a song she reportedly wrote about Sam Shepard), which you’re less than a minute into it before the arrival of those remarkable lines — “There’s no comprehending / Just how close to the bone and the skin and the eyes / And the lips you can get / And still feel so alone / And still feel related / Like stations in some relay” — the strange, restless chords pulling the lyrics into heightening realms of poetry, compelling the song onward, just as she is compelled further down that mythic American freeway, of whose “white lines,” she is a “prisoner.”

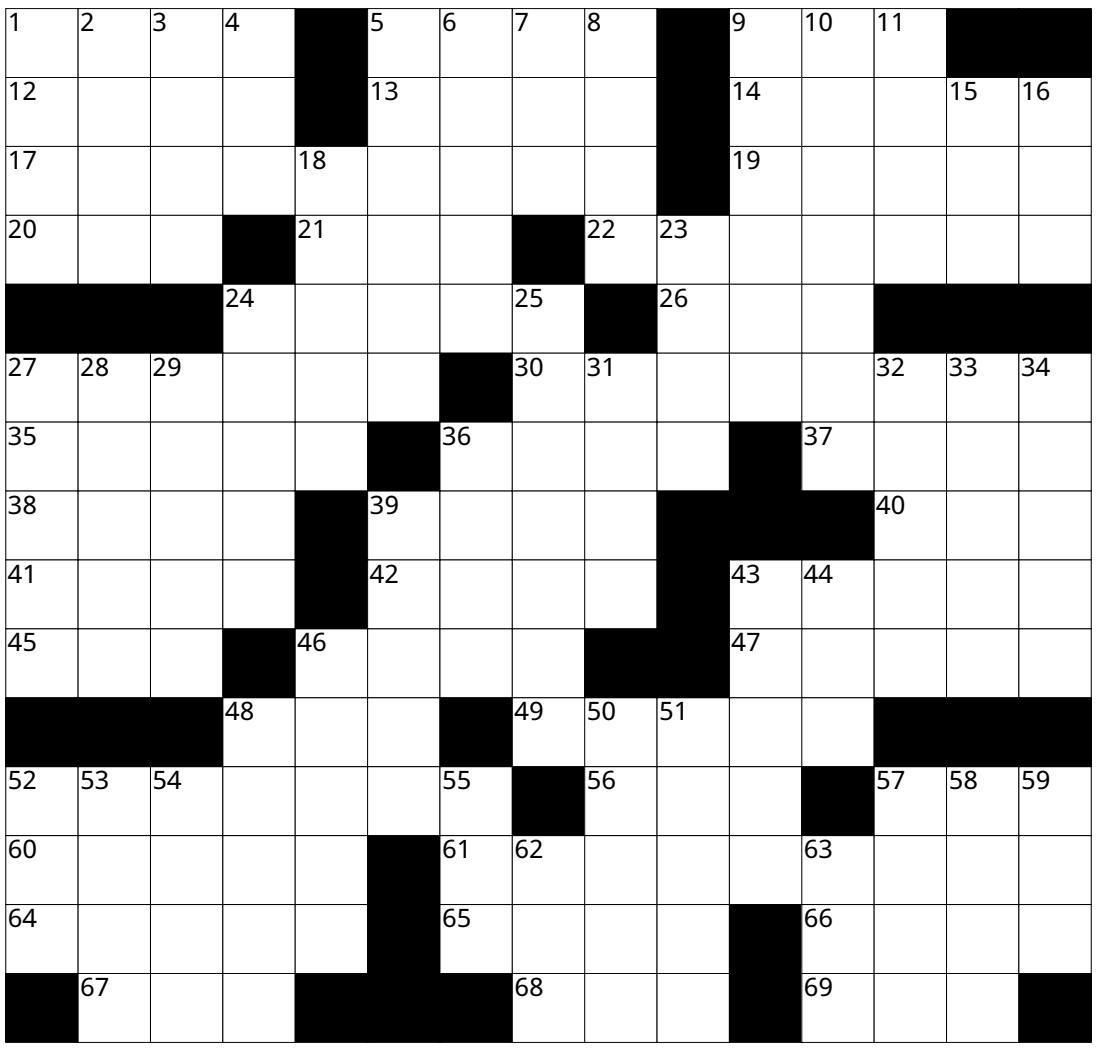
COURTESY PHOTO / “THE LAST WALTZ”
Still from “The Last Waltz”, directed by Martin Scorsese.

But then you won’t even have time for The Band’s performances of their own songs: Rick Danko, pain written on his eyelids, pulling the last syllable out of the last word of “It Makes No Difference” like a vein out of his own heart (this, one of the most best songs about heartbreak ever written); or Levon Helm, grimacing through a drum build into the release of the last chorus of “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down,” and then leaning, with all his guttural Arkansas conviction, into its refrain as Danko hits his highest harmony (that, one of the best songs about American history ever written).

All the individual moments aside, what’s felt by the end of the film is that this is some of the best American music ever made — and some of the best music from anywhere ever made because of its American inheritances, deep and varied. No matter that many of the main players (Robertson, Danko, Mitchell, Young) come from Canada, or an island across the ocean (Morrison). They wanted to take part, to hear in their own voices the movement of an American cadence. You recognize that desire in The Band, especially. They fell in love with the music of the place, and then they fell in love with the place itself. What a gift that someone was there to film them fifty years ago, when they brought out the sound of it.

The Tribe Has Spoken

Avery Goldstein



ACROSS
1 Farm tower
5 Poetry contest
9 Poem of praise
12 Just ___ on the map
13 Actress Polo of "Meet the Parents"
14 Strongly suggests
17 Big fat zeros
19 Itsy-bitsy
20 Swiss peak
21 Shapiro of NPR
22 "___ and upwards!"
24 “How ____ we ___ proceed?”
26 Objective
27 NASA moon landing program
30 Newspaper founded in 1982
35 Milestone season for a show whose motto appears in this puzzle
36 Shock
37 Pleasant
38 London gallery
39 Bamboozle
40 "Chandelier" singer
41 Fed. power dept.
42 Frying liquids
43 Where much '90s music was stored
45 Harry Potter's best friend
46 Smidgen
47 Bird's perch
48 Rave music genre
49 Units in NFL statistics
52 *Third word in an iconic slogan
56 Epi center?
57 Monopoly token
60 Matter of fact?
61 "Thelma & Louise" character?
64 Verboten
65 Two of the Spice Girls
66 Sedona and Sorento
67 "Dancing With the Stars" judge Goodman
68 Golf peg
69 Where you still need pants for meetings, briefly

DOWN
1 Epic tale
2 Hidden Immunity ___
3 Circuit
4 WNBA tiebreakers
5 Sound system
6 Not bogus
7 Uru. neighbor
8 ___ soup
9 *First word in an iconic slogan
10 "You wish!"
11 Hungarian wine region
15 Finish
16 The "S" of GPS: Abbr.
18 Ahead of schedule
23 Indian bread
24 Modify
25 *Second word in an iconic slogan
27 Following
28 Steinway product
29 Frequently
31 Takes to court
32 '70s music genre
33 Vinegar and lemon juice, chemically
34 Leavening agent
36 Clubs or hearts
39 Sends to oblivion
43 Select from a menu
44 Refusals
46 Potato state
48 "Tiny Dancer" singer John
50 Honeycrisp, for one
51 Witherspoon of "The Morning Show"
52 Slugger Mel
53 Russian range
54 Toothpaste holder
55 18-mi. loop around town
57 "Aquarius" and "Good Morning Starshine" musical
58 Persnickety
59 QBs' successes
62 ___ Gala
63 Hit a bunny slope, say

BREAD & PUPPET BRINGS 'CHEAP ART' AND A RALLYING CRY FOR JUSTICE

By LILY JENSEN
Staff Writer

Local Vermont Bread & Puppet theatre, hosted by the Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies (GSFS) Department's annual Gensler Symposium and the Chellis House (Feminist Resource Center), brought their signature craft of humorous but heavy mixed-media puppet performance pieces to campus on Tuesday March 31, as a stop on their larger indoor tour: "The End of the World Neverminding Show."

The experience was no typical puppet show, ending with homemade bread and garlic spread. "The End of the World Neverminding Show" was an engaging mix of puppets and people narrating, singing and moving as a form of political storytelling and advocacy. The show opened with "The King Story," which followed a fictional kingdom that saw conflict between a dragon and a warrior. It then segued into a six-act collection featuring vignettes on current issues, including the rise in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, the war in Iran and the war in Gaza.

The acts included interpretive dances in which actors held cutouts of a human skeleton and of different professions: bus driver, baker, nurse, gardener, student, taxpayer among others. The fourth act saw actors hold cutouts of men in suits, with each character having a word in place of their face: Innocence, truth, normality, 'neverminder,' humdrum, N.Y. Times, compliance. The men in suits were chased out by a pig character dressed up as a police officer.

In these interactive puppet scenes, the troupe constantly subverts audience expectations.

"Each puppet was carrying different names, [such as] student taxpayers, bus driver. I suddenly realized that holding those figures actually had another identity on stage," Artemis Xintian '28 said in an interview with The Campus, describing her favorite vignette of the evening.

The show covered a range of different emotional experiences; the second-to-last act featured giant puppets that were caricatures of the Statue of Liberty dancing with an equally large Uncle Sam figure. The characters were flipped upside down, before being brought together to resemble a kiss.

"I liked ... how comical and sometimes crude and simple it is ... it creates a sort of dissonance," Xintian added.

The show ultimately ended on a hopeful note, with a beautiful final scene that featured the Palestinian Poppy as the futuristic "Not-yet" that is "impatient and unready."

This dissonance surfaced in other ways, too. Some of the scenes in the show were quite explicit and clear about their message, while others were more symbolic, leaving interpretation up to the audience. There was a short but impactful image after a very intense vignette of a deer in a herd looking up and following a moon. There was a stillness, collectivity and passivity articulated in the image, creating an emotional experience that guided the audience into the next phase of the creation.

These more interpretive scenes were the subject of questions and conversations at the facilitated talk-back after the show. There was also gorgeous merch for sale, and an interactive three-hour workshop the next day, led by the troupe.

The idea to bring Bread & Puppet was the brainchild of Harper Nichols '25, the director of the Chellis House.

"I saw [Bread & Puppet] for the first time, two years ago... it made me cry. It made me lose my mind. It was super impactful to me as a person and as an artist...It was, like, one of my big goals to bring them to Middlebury," Nichols said in an interview with the Campus.

This experience is not unique to Nichols.

"I actually went to Middlebury [as a student]. And I remember seeing them at the field house...I'll never forget it. It was a magical experience," Catherine Wright, associate professor of GSFS and interim chair of the GSFS department, said in an interview with The Campus.

The Gensler Symposium is the event for which the GSFS department and feminist resource center are granted the most funds and resources, and it takes on different capacities each year.

"Usually we bring more academic speakers and professors to come and speak to the work they do, and do workshops," Nichols said.

Bread & Puppet was clearly a different choice. Even though Gensler has been radical, artistic and interactive in the past, the large crowd Bread & Puppet drew stood out compared to other years, when events were more catered to the people involved with the department.

Between the event being free for students, the variety of co-sponsers — The Committee on the Arts, The Knoll, The Climate Action Program, Sunday Night Environmental Group and by departments in Theatre, Dance, Studio Art, English, Sociology, American Studies, Writing and Rhetoric and the International and Global Studies Gender Track — and Bread & Puppet's ability to address interlocking justice issues, the event drew a huge turn out, nearly filling Wilson Hall.

"I think that it was really nothing that you can't think about through a feminist and gender lens," White said. While gender was not the sole focus, gender issues played out clearly on the Bread & Puppet stage."

Beyond the main performance, attendees at the troupe's workshop described it as fun and inspiring.

"It's really neat to be able to perform and work with the community," Ocea Goddard, a company member, said in an interview with The Campus.

The workshop was centered on the ancient art form of the "Cantastoria," where a chorus and a narrator tell a story through gestures, song, sounds and lines that point to a series of cloth or paper tapestries that two people keep flipping as the story progresses. In the workshop, participants were tasked with learning one of the Bread & Puppet ones, making them out of paper with random words and pictures, and then creating their own from scratch.

"I had no idea what's happening behind the scenes. I wanted to participate in how you transform very abstract thoughts irrelevant to each other," Xintian said about why she spontaneously signed up for the workshop after the talk-back the night before.

These school visits are not unusual for Bread & Puppet, but they break up the typical tour structure of six shows a week for four weeks with two to three school visits in between. "The End of the World Neverminding Show" is part of their spring indoor tour, which is very different from their outdoor touring circus, which circulates in the fall.

"The spring show is unique in that we get together in March, and then in a couple of weeks, we usually kind of create a show from scratch," Goddard said.

The resident company works and lives full-time on their farm in Glover, VT, which Bread & Puppet moved to during the 1970s as a part of the "Back to the Land" movement. Like this way of living and being together, the Bread & Puppet process of making is not traditional. While Peter Shuman, artist, activist and author, is the founding artistic director at Bread & Puppet — having founded it in 1963 as one of the first non-profit, political theatre companies ever — the puppeteers are very involved as they create a lot of content for the show and always improve it through tweaking it while on tour. This includes some improvisation, often a lot of the group puppet movement, during the actual show.

"I mean, something that's neat about working with Bread & Puppet is because we don't really have such narrow roles; everyone can do everything," Goddard said.

Bread & Puppet describes puppetry as "the people's theatre," an ancient and accessible form of theatre that began on the street. Puppets don't need expensive resources to be effective; in fact, they refer to their art as "cheap art," using scraps to create striking and beautiful puppets that are rough around the edges.

Photos from Bread & Puppet's performance last Tuesday. The troop performed to a nearly full crowd at Wilson Hall.

COURTESY PHOTOS / DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND FEMINIST STUDIES

‘LOVE STORY: JFK JR. AND CAROLYN BESSETTE’: A COMPELLING STORY, EVEN IF ACCURACY FALLS FLAT

By PHOEBE ADLER
Contributing Writer

Ryan Murphy’s newest drama has everything a fan of his would expect – dramatic storylines, heavy extremes and any opportunity to invoke his key “baroque” style. “Love Story: JFK Jr. and Carolyn Bessette” is a nine-part series about the high-profile marriage of John F. Kennedy Jr. (Paul Anthony Kelly) and Carolyn Bessette (Sarah Pidgeon) through their meeting in 1990s New York City, their intimate wedding in Cumberland Island, Georgia and the tragic plane crash off the coast of Martha’s Vineyard resulting in both of their deaths.

Picture New York City in the 1990s. Taxis were hailed by yelling and raising arms, movie tickets were under $10, and JFK Jr. was the American Prince – handsome, charming and a hot topic in the headlines...even when he did not want to be. One of the first scenes of “Love Story” depicts a dejected JFK Jr. trying to navigate through the bustling streets of NYC while avoiding the glaring headline: “The Hunk Flunks...Again.”

Meanwhile, over in Midtown, Carolyn Bessette had the city at her fingertips. Rising through the ranks at Calvin Klein, Bessette would eventually assume the role of fashion publicist, bringing names such as the then-unknown Kate Moss into the limelight with her fresh ideas, even impressing Mr Klein himself. The two were at completely different points in their careers, yet their meeting seems to change everything.

Here is where things begin to complicate. In “Love Story,” the two meet because Calvin Klein brings Bessette over to Kennedy Jr., murmuring, “You’re gonna thank me for this,” right before. But did this meeting actually happen? A recent GQ article questions this but notes that, whatever Klein’s role was, he was integral to their meeting. Based on many books about both Kennedy Jr. and Bessette, other stories of their meeting include Kennedy Jr. spotting Bessette at a party and Klein selecting Bessette to fit Kennedy Jr. for a custom suit. While it is unclear whether Klein actually introduced the two, this meeting is certainly impactful on the trajectory of “Love Story.” Kennedy Jr. is smitten, and while it takes Bessette a moment to see him for more than just a pretty face (with slightly less pretty brains), the two fall in love, and the rest is history, albeit a tragic and difficult one, as we continue to see over the next episodes.

Jack Schlossberg, the grandson of President John F. Kennedy, nephew of Kennedy Jr., and a congressional candidate in New York’s 12th District, has also noted the inaccurate material in “Love Story” and recently expressed his disdain for the show. In an extended interview with CBS Sunday Morning, Schlossberg did not hold back on his thoughts regarding Murphy and his creation: “If you want to know someone who’s never met anyone in my family, who knows nothing about us, talk to Ryan Murphy. I just want people who do watch the show to watch it with one letter in mind: capital ‘F’ for ‘fiction.’”

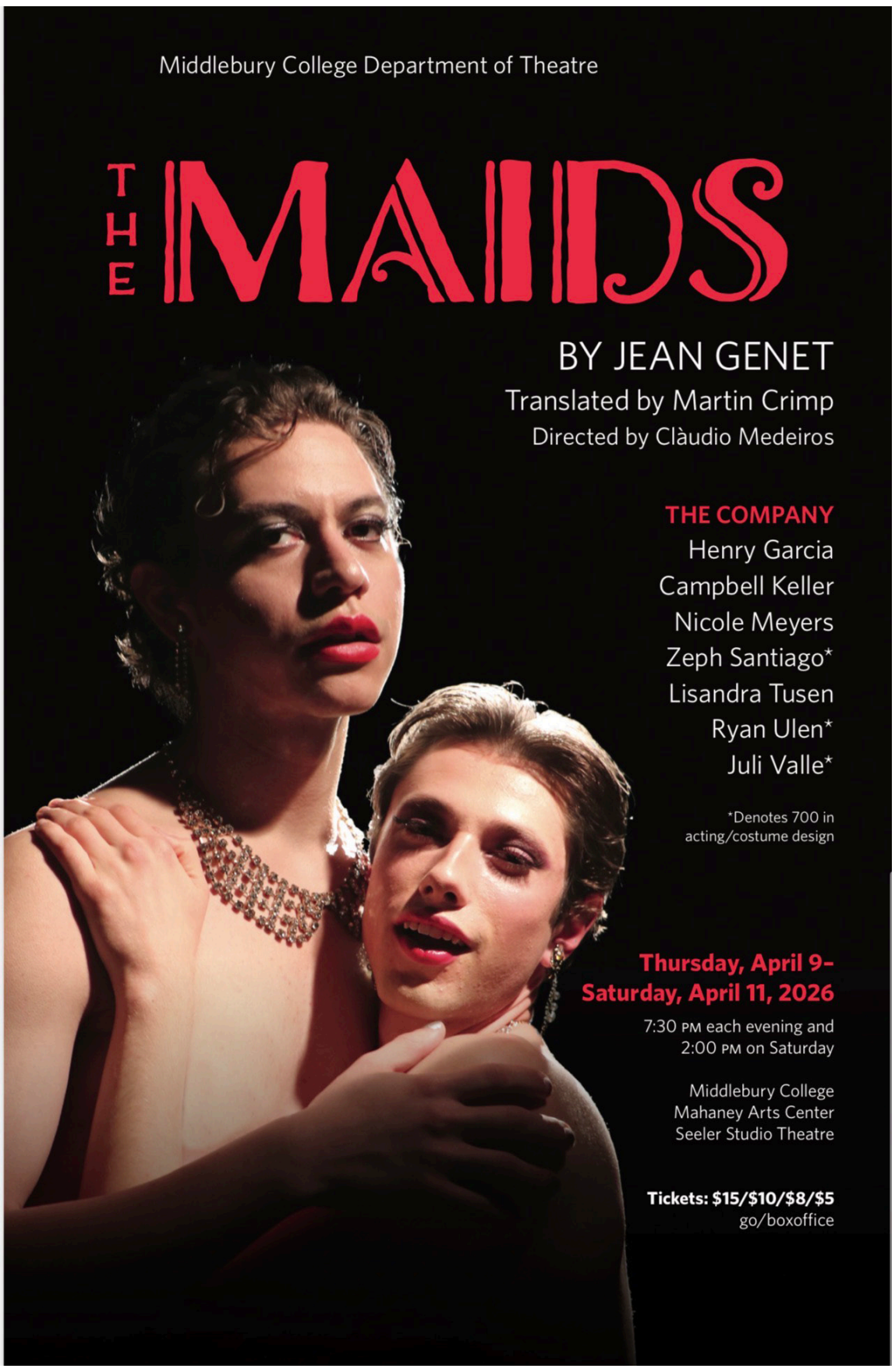
COURTESY PHOTOS / “LOVE STORY”
Stills from “Love Story”, directed by Ryan Murphy.

Additionally, actress Daryl Hannah, a former girlfriend of Kennedy Jr., who appears in “Love Story” and is portrayed as “an adversary to what you want narratively in the story”, according to one of the show’s producers. Similar to Schlossberg, Hannah addressed the inaccuracies in the show, noting that “The character ‘Daryl Hannah’ portrayed in the series is not even a remotely accurate representation of my life, my conduct or my relationship with John,” and “It’s appalling to me that I even have to defend myself against a television show. These are not creative embellishments of personality. They are assertions about conduct — and they are false.”

This show is not a new concept to the Ryan Murphy (“Glee,” “Pose,” “Monster”)-verse – the American writer and director has created many series based on real individuals, full of horrifying graphics and memorable scenes, many of which are not entirely accurate. For example, when the “Monster: The Ed Gein” story was released about the 1950s killer and grave robber, there was a similar media wave of articles addressing what was and was not true. But what sets “Love Story” aside is that it makes a drastic shift. One goes into this show thinking it will be a fun watch full of 90s NYC content and iconic outfits from both Bessette and Kennedy Jr., but it quickly turns dark as Bessette becomes increasingly involved in the Kennedy family. Soon, it doesn’t even seem like the fun romance you thought it would be.

New York Times critic Wesley Morris has an interesting take on the evolution of “Love Story,” comparing Carolyn Bessette’s life pre-JFK Jr. to “Sex and the City,” while her life afterwards (which is the focus of the majority of the show) to “Rosemary’s Baby.” While this is a fairly drastic comparison, I cannot help but partially agree because, in several ways, much of “Love Story” follows Bessette as she descends into a life of fear and darkness — a stark contrast to the exciting, glamorous world she once experienced. Morris notes a scene I found moving as well, in which Bessette is lying alone beneath a glass coffee table in her living room, pressing her palms against it. She has become a caged animal. As Morris puts it: “The only reason this show was called ‘Love Story’ is because ‘American Horror Story’ was already taken.”

My thoughts? This is certainly not a must-watch (my personal favorite Murphy work is “Glee” – watch for Mercedes and Kurt), but if you want to take a deep dive into one of America’s most famous families, this is not a bad start. It moves away from the typically glamorous perception of this family and provides a new insight into one of the most famous women of the 90s, whom we never really knew. Food for thought.



AFTER STRONG START TO THE SEASON, MIDDLEBURY BASEBALL DROPS SERIES TO AMHERST

By THEO MANIATIS
Sports Editor

After a barnstorming start to the season, Middlebury men's baseball dropped a three-game series to conference rival Amherst over the weekend, bringing their record to 12–7. On Friday, Middlebury walked it off in a thriller, but Amherst sailed to two wins over the next day's doubleheader.

It was a pitcher's duel in the first game. Chase Zidlicky '29 took the mound for the Panthers, facing the Mammoths' Nick Fassert. For the first four innings, neither of them budged. Then in the fifth, the Mammoths broke through for two runs.

Zidlicky bowed out in the sixth inning, giving up only two earned runs and striking out six. Christian Zebrowski '28 relieved him, tossing three perfect innings, notching four strikeouts, and keeping Middlebury in the game until the end.

Incredibly, Amherst's Fassert was bidding for a perfect game until the sixth — when the hitting machine that is Henry Ayers '29 hit a single (keeping his average at .500). Sam Gersch '29 followed up with a triple, cutting Amherst's lead to 3-1.

To the bottom of the ninth, the Panthers went. To the relief of all Middlebury hitters, Fassert had been taken out in the eighth, so it was a new ballgame.

"We knew if they were going to switch the pitcher, we definitely had a chance," Alex Glasscock '28 said. "And we saw the body language of the team, and it was like 'yeah, we're going to win this.'"

"Regardless of what happened the first eight innings, it's all about the next pitch," head coach Mike Leonard added.

The Panthers took that advice to heart, loading the bases from a walk and two singles — one of them by Joe Basso '27 on a two-strike count.

"His ability to see multiple pitches and grind that out, find a way on base, was really impressive," Leonard said.

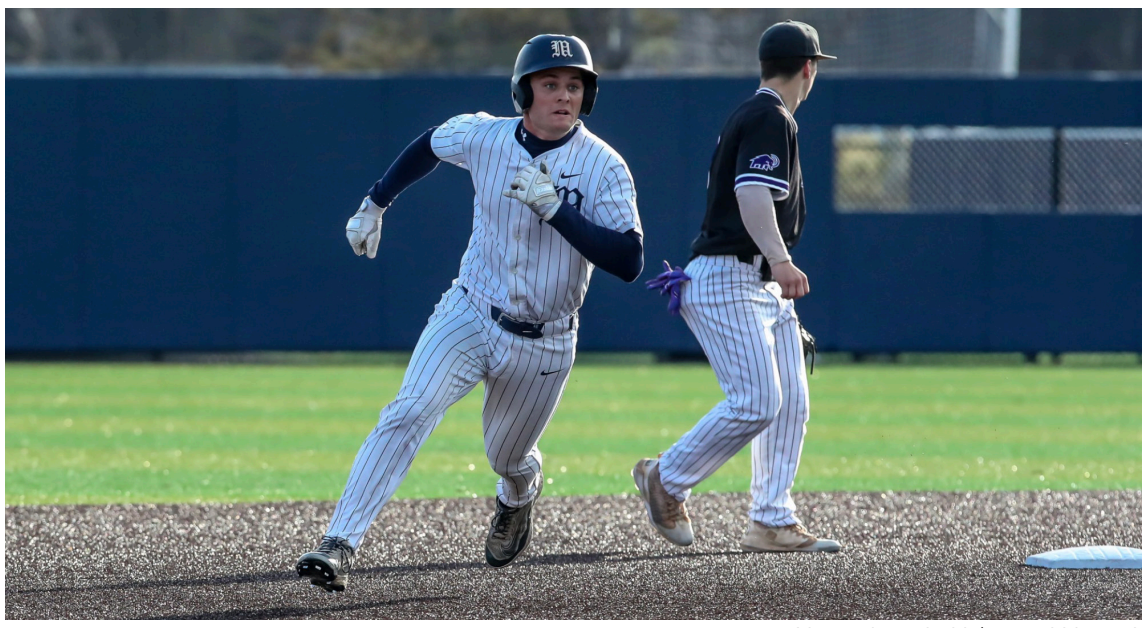
With defeat looming, Anthony Pellagrin '27 hit a single to bring in two runs and tie the game at 3-3. One pitch later, Brian Olson '28, as he tried to check his swing, ended up dishing the ball into center field for a single. Gersch thundered around third, sliding into home ahead of the Mammoth outfielder's throw: comeback complete.

"We have this narrative that we can win those games... we've won those games before," Glasscock said.

And then came Saturday. Around 50 people lined the first-base side of the field, alternating between watching baseball and the softball team down below, who won all four of their games this weekend.

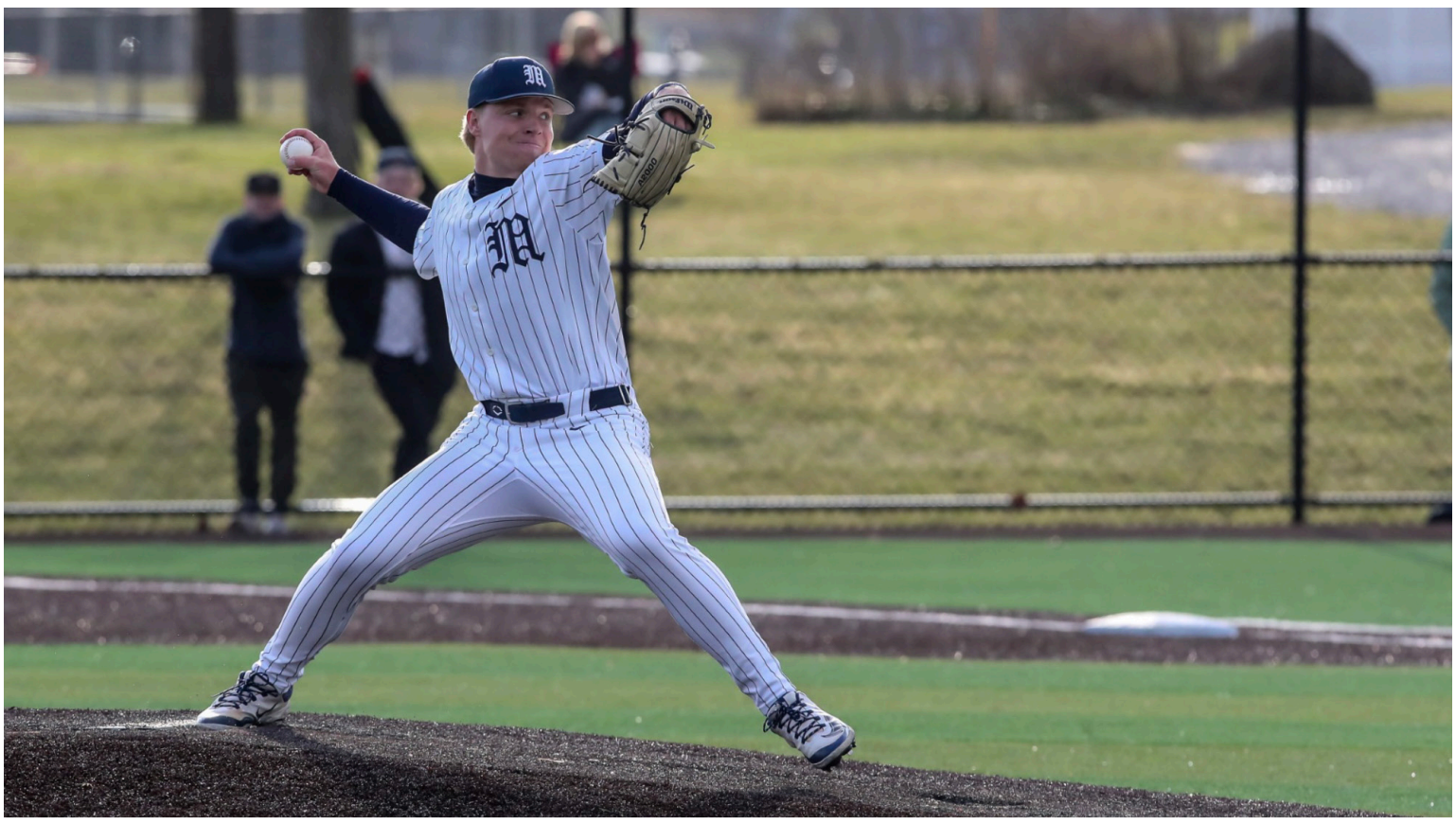
The first game of the day could have swung either way. Of course, the Amherst pitcher decided to have the game of his life again — seven innings, two runs. But after Ayers hit a solo shot, Amherst was only up 3-2 heading after five. In the sixth, a double cleared the bases to make it 6-2, and Middlebury couldn't reproduce any of the theatrics from the day earlier.

"There were a couple moments that didn't go our way— and unfortunately went Amherst's way," Leonard said. "That was the difference."



COURTESY PHOTOS / WILL COSTELLO

First year standout Henry Ayers '29 scored two runs in Middlebury's first game against Amherst.



Pitcher Christian Zebrowski '28 didn't allow any hits for three innings on Friday.

Saturday's second game was more lopsided than the first. After four innings, Amherst led 6-0. "It's a barrel party!" yelled the Amherst players — one of their tamer remarks. In the fifth, Glasscock sparked some momentum when he hit a solo home run to right-center field. The Panthers then loaded the bases, and it looked that they might pull closer, but a groundout ended the inning.

"I think we've taken a lot from those two losses. This team is really good at learning from those things and not dwelling on them," Glasscock said.

For a team that only has one senior, the weekend was a learning experience. And they'll have their chance to get revenge against Amherst later in the year, whose pitchers will have hopefully transferred to DI by then. In the meantime, the Panthers face Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute on Wednesday and then head to New York to play Hamilton in back-to-back games on Friday and Saturday.

EXCELLENCE, PURPOSE AND AN END TO 41 YEARS AT MIDDLEBURY: A CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS ERIN QUINN '86

By SIMON SCHMIEDER
Senior Sports Editor

Unlike the Davis Family Library, BiHall and Kenyon Arena, fraternities existed on campus when Erin Quinn '86 began coaching at Middlebury. Quinn has since overlapped with six college presidents, and in his time as Athletic Director alone, Middlebury has earned 69 NESCAC team titles, 19 NCAA team championships and 29 NCAA individual titles. Now, at the end of this academic year, Quinn will conclude his 41 years with the college.

Having led Middlebury's athletics department for 20 years, Quinn is the longest-tenured athletic director in the NESCAC. Prior to assuming the role in 2006, Quinn served as an assistant coach for men's lacrosse and football for one season after graduating in 1986. Afterwards, Quinn continued to coach at Tufts and Lake Forest College, forgoing a head coaching role to return to Middlebury. From 1990 to 1991, he served as the assistant men's lacrosse coach, and then assistant football coach from 1990 to 2005. In 1992, Quinn became the head men's lacrosse coach.

Quinn's tenure as the men's lacrosse coach remains a puzzle to some. Having played football for four years at Middlebury, Quinn began coaching lacrosse with no direct playing experience. Yet after 15 seasons at the helm, Quinn's team won six NESCAC titles, three consecutive NCAA championships and finished with a 202–38 record.

Quinn credits his Middlebury education for his successes, citing a former classmate as an example of how the college teaches its students how to learn.

"This guy [his former classmate] didn't run a huge division at Microsoft in college, nor did he speak Chinese and Japanese. He studied German and was a basketball player. He has now run Microsoft Japan and Microsoft China. Middlebury made me feel confident in my ability to learn new things," Quinn said.

Still, the learning curve was steep. Quinn, mentored by the prior men's lacrosse coach, Jim Grube, completed a crash course in the weeks before his first season.

"We are both early morning guys and like our coffees, so we'd meet at 4:30 in the morning to put in a full workday before the workday started," Quinn said. Long before students' 8:15 classes, the pair would study the game, watching and narrating film for hours until their other jobs began.

A proven learner, Quinn then made a strong case for himself when the Athletic Director position opened in 2006.

"I knew that this was again something completely different, but that I had transferable skills. I can operate in a new environment with a steep learning curve and succeed at it."

Having intentionally run the entire men's lacrosse program, and not merely coached the team, Quinn anticipated scaling his tasks — connecting alumni and students, building culture, fundraising and establishing mentorship programs — to the entire athletic department.

Transitioning from coach to athletic director also meant losing day-to-day contact with students and the joy of working directly with athletes. G. Thomas Lawson, Quinn's father-in-law and Middlebury's Athletic Director a decade prior, and Russ Reilly, the Athletic Director at the time, both warned Quinn about this loss.

"The two former people who did the same thing I did — coach at Middlebury, and then become athletic directors — were both trying to talk me out of this job [...] It helped me go into the job with eyes wide open."

As former president Ron Liebowitz often said, the Athletic Director serves every constituent of the college: Faculty, staff, students, trustees, administration, the local community, alumni, and parents. As a consequence, it is rare that one's decisions in the role will please everyone.

"You've failed a lot over time in various people's eyes because you can't please everybody all the time. You've got these big decisions that you're making that are never right. There's no perfect decision. You're making these imperfect decisions with imperfect information, doing the best you can."

In a position where most serve 10 years, Quinn's two-decade tenure suggests that he overcame these challenges. If anything, Quinn excelled in his role, receiving the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Division III Athletic Director of the Year award in 2021. Yet between the titles, championships and accolades, it's the students that have kept him at the helm of the department.

"I think we have great people here. I started with the students because ultimately that's why we're here [...] I think of my role as a service role, and it's in service to the students."

The students themselves have changed over Quinn's time. Quinn observes that athletes are specializing far earlier in their sports than before, and that the sports systems in which athletes develop have become far more transactional. Rather than playing for the love of the game, athletes — often driven by their parents — focus on mere achievement. The same trend applies to academics, and these changes have all reinforced one another at the expense of students' mental health.

COURTESY PHOTOS / MIDDLEBURY ATHLETICS

Erin Quinn '86 played football at Middlebury and was a captain in his senior year.

COURTESY PHOTOS / ERIN QUINN

Quinn began his role as the Director of Athletics in 2006.

"It's this balance of being present and enjoying it in the moment, not being transactional about the academic experience, the educational experience, the athletic experience, the social experience." Students must learn to "slow down and enjoy and savor and thrive in the moment," Quinn explained.

That same mindset shaped the success of the men's lacrosse program under Quinn. Not just athletes, but all students, should distinguish the object from the purpose of an activity — winning from physically pushing yourself, good grades from learning, a perfect concert from the art of playing itself.

"We never talked about winning championships. We talked about culture, showing up every day, [and] being present for each other. We were very focused on being in the present."

Moving forward, Quinn looks forward to having more time for family, friends and personal interests. In the works are a second-half Ironman, gravel biking, various forms of skiing, reading, and writing. For now, as Quinn prepares to leave his role, students and athletes alike ought to remind themselves of their why. If there's one lesson to learn from Erin Quinn's 41 decorated years with Middlebury, it's the value of "excellence with a purpose."

WILLIAMS DOWNS MIDDLEBURY MEN'S TENNIS

By VICTOR KORTE AND SIMON SCHMIEDER
Staff Writer and Senior Sports Editor

Walking closer to Middlebury's new outdoor tennis courts last weekend, the sound of tennis balls pinging off rackets and chants of "Let's go Midd!" occasionally ripped through the quiet but surprisingly pleasant April air.

The 15th-ranked men's tennis squad faced off against #19 Williams on Saturday, Apr. 4, coming up short 6–1. The day started with the doubles slate. Middlebury won the third slot but fell short on the #1 match and almost clinched #2 in a 7–6 tiebreak. Williams narrowly took the first point, setting the tone for the singles slate.

"Doubles was a nailbiter, could have gone either way," Nikky Kondamuri '27 said.

After a short break, all six singles matches started at once. For the next two hours, six Panthers battled the Williams squad in an attempt to clear the 0–1 deficit. "We're down on five courts, but we have to keep battling, show them what we have and give it our all," Kondamuri said during the singles matches.

COURTESY PHOTO / ANDY GOBIN

Reif Larsen '28 secured Middlebury's only point on Saturday against Williams.

The battling spirit was put on display when Julian Wu '26 won a point with broken strings at the start of his second set. Unfazed, Wu jogged to the bench to grab an identical, unbroken racket and played on.

Unfortunately for the Panthers, Williams dominated from the start and quickly brought their advantage to 3–0 when Middlebury's #2 and #6 lost in two sets. Shortly after, the #3 ended with Williams victorious at 4–0. The Panthers' only victory came with Reif Larsen '28 winning the #4 (6–2, 7–5).

"The loss is a great learning experience for our team, and we are looking forward to some of the big conference matches in the upcoming weeks," Larsen said. "I have full confidence in my teammates that we will all peak together in the right moments, and we have no doubts that the results will come."

"We started out the season on a really strong note, returning from our California trip with a record of 9–1," Jake Cohen, the assistant coach, said.

The single loss for the Panthers in the Golden State came against the first-ranked Claremont-Mudd-Scripps program.

"Unfortunately, this past weekend in our first home match of the season, we lost to Williams 1–6. It was a good learning experience for the team and a wake-up call, and we plan on bouncing back this weekend with two more NESCAC opponents ahead," Cohen said.

On Saturday, the men's tennis team will head to Hartford to face Trinity. The following day, the Panthers return home to face the #2 Tufts team—a formidable opponent and another chance to prove themselves in NESCAC competition on South Street.